

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
EASTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN  
SOUTHERN DIVISION

— — —

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Plaintiff,

v.

Case No. 21-20264

YLLI DIDANI,

Defendant.

JURY TRIAL - VOLUME 15 - EXCERPT  
Testimony of Manuel Rego  
BEFORE THE HONORABLE DENISE PAGE HOOD  
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

Theodore Levin United States Courthouse  
231 West Lafayette Boulevard  
Detroit, Michigan  
Wednesday, March 12, 2025

**APPEARANCES:**

**For the Plaintiff:** Mark Bilkovic  
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**For the Defendant:** Ylli Didani  
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**Also Present:** Special Agent Chad Hermans  
Maria DiCarlo, Paralegal

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

MATTER PAGE

**JURY TRIAL - VOLUME 15 - EXCERPT**

**Government's Case in Chief (Continued)**

**MANUEL REGO**

Direct examination by Mr. Bilkovic.....	4
Cross-examination by Defendant Didani.....	12
Redirect examination by Mr. Bilkovic.....	18
Recross examination by Defendant Didani.....	20
Certificate of Court Reporter.....	21

E X H I B I T      I N D E X

<u>Exhibit No.</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Identified</u>	<u>Admitted</u>
None			

1 Detroit, Michigan

2 Wednesday, March 12, 2025

3 1:37 p.m.

4 - - -

5 (Beginning of excerpt.)

6 THE COURT: Okay. Is this your next witness?

7 MR. BILKOVIC: I did not see him go up there, your  
8 Honor. I apologize. This is the next witness. I'm sorry.

9 THE COURT: Step down, okay, just for a second to be  
10 sworn in. Raise your right hand.

11 (Oath administered.)

12 THE COURT: All right. We can see you're pretty eager  
13 to testify.

14 MR. BILKOVIC: Your Honor, I literally asked my agent  
15 where is he and he pointed up there.

16 THE COURT: I know, and then suddenly he's in the  
17 chair.

18 Tell us your name and spell your last name for the  
19 record. And you need to speak to this part of the microphone,  
20 okay.

21 THE WITNESS: Yeah. Do you hear me? Okay.

22 My name is Manuel Rego, R-E-G-O.

23 \* \* \*

24 MANUEL REGO,

25 was called as a witness at 1:37 p.m. after having been

1                   duly sworn to testify to the truth.

2                                           \*                   \*                   \*

3                                           DIRECT EXAMINATION

4   BY MR. BILKOVIC:

5   Q.   Sir, how are you employed?

6                   THE COURT: Did you provide your whole name?

7                   THE WITNESS: Yes.

8                   THE COURT: Just R-E-G-O?

9                   THE WITNESS: Yes.

10  BY MR. BILKOVIC:

11  Q.   Your first name is Manuel?

12  A.   Manuel, yes.

13  Q.   Manuel.

14                   THE COURT: Okay. That's what I wanted to know --

15                   THE WITNESS: Yeah.

16                   THE COURT: -- your full name.

17                   THE WITNESS: Manuel Rego.

18  BY MR. BILKOVIC:

19  Q.   And can you spell Manuel?

20  A.   M-A-N-U-E-L.

21                   THE COURT: Thank you.

22                   MR. BILKOVIC: May I proceed, your Honor?

23                   THE COURT: You may now proceed.

24                   MR. BILKOVIC: Thank you.

25

1 BY MR. BILKOVIC:

2 Q. How are you employed?

3 A. I'm an agent with the Drug Enforcement Administration,  
4 special agent.

5 Q. How long -- the DEA?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. How long have you been employed as a special agent with the  
8 DEA?

9 A. In May it will be 20 years.

10 Q. So 2005?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. And did you have any prior law enforcement experience prior  
13 to coming to the DEA?

14 A. Yes. I began in 2002 with Immigration and Naturalization  
15 Service, which was -- later became the Customs and Border  
16 Protection.

17 Q. And did you work there from 2002 then to 2005?

18 A. Yes, I did.

19 Q. And what assignments have you had with the DEA since you  
20 began in 2005, starting with your earliest assignment?

21 A. Well, out of the academy I went to JFK Airport in New York  
22 where I was there for eight and a half years. From there I  
23 went to the New York division where I was in Group D-35 for two  
24 years. From there I was selected to the Strike Force Bilateral  
25 Investigations Unit where I remained until 2017.

1           In 2017, I was asked to help with the Chapo Guzman  
2 trial, and I was there for two years on that, at which time I  
3 was selected to become an agent in Madrid, Spain where I've  
4 been since 2019.

5 Q.   Okay. I'm going to go back through --

6           THE COURT: Wait one second. You're a DEA agent in  
7 Madrid, Spain?

8           THE WITNESS: Yes, I am.

9           THE COURT: Okay.

10 BY MR. BILKOVIC:

11 Q.   The assignment that you had at JFK, you said you were there  
12 for eight and a half years. What was your role at JFK for  
13 eight and a half years?

14 A.   Investigate drug crimes and drugs coming into the airport.

15 Q.   And then when you were in the New York division following  
16 that what did you do there?

17 A.   There we worked mostly local drug trafficking in New York  
18 City.

19 Q.   And then you said that you worked on the Chapo Guzman case?

20 A.   No. From there I went to the Bilateral Investigations  
21 Unit, 959 group, which is more international cases, drug  
22 traffickers outside the United States sending drugs into the  
23 United States.

24 Q.   And was that also in New York?

25 A.   Yes.

1 Q. And you said you started in Spain when?

2 A. I started October of 2019.

3 Q. And how did that come about?

4 A. I applied for the position and was selected after the  
5 application process.

6 Q. Does the DEA have an office in Spain?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Where is the office located in Spain?

9 A. Located in the U.S. embassy in Madrid.

10 Q. And how many people are assigned to that office from the  
11 DEA?

12 A. We have six individuals in that office. Three of them are  
13 agents, one's a supervisory agent, we have an intel analyst and  
14 we have a secretary.

15 Q. Are there other federal agencies, law enforcement agencies,  
16 that also work out of the U.S. embassy in Madrid?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. And what agencies?

19 A. Off the top of my head, FBI, Homeland Security, Secret  
20 Service. That's pretty much the ones I remember.

21 Q. What are your duties? What is it that you do with the DEA  
22 in Spain?

23 A. I'm a liaison. So my job is to assist offices in the  
24 United States and around the world with any investigation that  
25 touches Spain.

1 Q. And is that something that you do on a daily basis?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Is it common to have investigations that involve the United  
4 States and Spain as well as other countries?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. And are there law enforcement agencies in Spain that you  
7 work with as part of your duties?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. What are some of the law enforcement agencies that you work  
10 with there?

11 A. The three primary agencies we work with are the Spanish  
12 National Police, the Spanish Guardia Seville, G-U-A-R-D-I, and  
13 Spanish Customs.

14 Q. And are these federal agencies, are they local agencies?

15 A. Those are federal agencies.

16 Q. Do they each have a certain role?

17 A. Yeah. Well, within Spain they do, but they all investigate  
18 drug trafficking, for example.

19 Q. I'm sorry?

20 A. They all investigate drug trafficking. They do have  
21 certain roles within the country, but all three of them are  
22 involved in drug trafficking.

23 Q. Are you familiar with a port -- a shipping port in Spain,  
24 the Port of Bilbao?

25 A. Yes.



1 Q. And where is that located?

2 MR. McDONALD: Called the port of what?

3 MR. BILKOVIC: I'm sorry. Bilbao, B-I-L-B-A-O.

4 BY MR. BILKOVIC:

5 Q. You are familiar with that?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. And where is that located?

8 A. It's located in the north of Spain on the north coast. It  
9 is in the -- what's called the Basque region of Spain.

10 Q. And how far is that from where you are at?

11 A. By car, it's about a five to six-hour drive.

12 Q. Do you know whether or not there is Spanish law enforcement  
13 present at the port?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. And what agency would that be?

16 A. There would be two, Guardia Seville and Spanish Customs.

17 Q. I'm going to take your attention to April 25th of 2020.

18 Did you receive -- the year 2020. Did you receive certain  
19 information from a DEA task force officer in Detroit by the  
20 name of Brandon Leach?

21 A. Yes, I did.

22 Q. Did you know TFO Leach prior to that?

23 A. No, I didn't.

24 Q. Can you generally describe the type of information that you  
25 had received?

1 A. TFO Leach was reaching out to me about a container that  
2 they were looking at that they had intelligence on. He  
3 provided me the container number, said that they believed it  
4 would have gone to the Port of Bilbao. I contacted our  
5 counterparts in Spain who confirmed to me that four days prior  
6 that container had been found positive for cocaine.

7 Q. You indicated that he had provided you information on a  
8 shipping container?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Were you provided the shipping container number?

11 A. Yes, I was.

12 Q. And were you provided the containership that the shipping  
13 container was supposed to be on?

14 A. I can't remember whether I was provided that or I learned  
15 it later.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. But it was the MSC Jenny.

18 Q. You definitely were provided the container number, though?

19 A. Yes. Yes, I was.

20 Q. And what did you do with that information?

21 A. I contacted our counterpart for the Spanish Customs and  
22 asked them if they had any intelligence on that container  
23 number.

24 Q. Why would you contact that department?

25 A. Because they're the ones that are usually in the ports and

1 have a lot of information on containers, the companies that  
2 would ship items and stuff like that.

3 Q. And you received information back from them?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. And did you pass that information on to Task Force Officer  
6 Leach?

7 A. Yes, I did.

8 Q. Do you recall the general nature of the information that  
9 you passed on to him?

10 A. I didn't have much information, just that it had been  
11 positive, I believe it was for 1,100 kilos of cocaine.

12 Q. Now, is it fair to say that you were not involved in that  
13 seizure?

14 A. No, I wasn't at all.

15 Q. Do you know an individual by the name of Javier Herran  
16 La Fuente?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. And who is that?

19 A. He's the supervisor, the boss of Bilbao Spanish Customs.

20 Q. And do you know somebody by the name of Marta Flores  
21 Fernandez?

22 A. Yes, I do.

23 Q. And who is she?

24 A. She also works for Spanish Customs and is right below  
25 Javier.

1 Q. And do you know if they were involved in that seizure in  
2 Bilbao?

3 A. Yes, they were.

4 Q. Are they both present here in the United States to testify  
5 in this case?

6 A. Yes, they are.

7 Q. Do they speak English or Spanish?

8 A. Spanish.

9 Q. So did you have anything else to do with the investigation?  
10 Like did you investigate any aspects of that seizure?

11 A. No, I did not.

12 MR. BILKOVIC: Can I have one moment, your Honor?

13 THE COURT: Sure.

14 MR. BILKOVIC: Nothing further.

15 THE COURT: Cross-examine.

16 CROSS-EXAMINATION

17 BY DEFENDANT DIDANI:

18 Q. Good afternoon, Agent Rego.

19 A. Good afternoon.

20 Q. How are you, sir?

21 A. Very well.

22 Q. You're located -- your office is located in Madrid?

23 A. Yes, it is.

24 Q. Spain?

25 A. Yes.

1 DEFENDANT DIDANI: Mr. Fink --

2 Your Honor, we want to -- just a Google map, please.

3 THE COURT: Yes. You want to put the map up?

4 DEFENDANT DIDANI: Yes, your Honor.

5 THE COURT: And show us where Spain is?

6 DEFENDANT DIDANI: Yes, your Honor.

7 THE COURT: Okay.

8 DEFENDANT DIDANI: Madrid.

9 BY DEFENDANT DIDANI:

10 Q. Agent Rego --

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. -- is that Madrid right there?

13 A. It's a lot of cities, but the one in the center of that  
14 peninsula is Madrid.

15 Q. Right there, huh, could we say?

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. Right there?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Is that continent -- where is that continent?

20 A. That's Europe.

21 Q. So Spain belong to Europe?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. How far is it from Detroit?

24 A. I don't know. About 3,000 miles, I guess.

25 Q. Agent Rego, you said you work hand to hand with Guardia

1 Seville?

2 A. I work with all three agencies, yes.

3 Q. Okay. And, Agent Rego, to be clear, in April 25, 2020,  
4 Detective Leach called you from Detroit?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. By phone; right?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. He contacted you with E-mail?

9 A. I don't recall if there was an E-mail.

10 Q. And let's be clear for the jury. What did he share with  
11 you in that April 25th?

12 A. That they had intelligence that a container -- and he gave  
13 me the container number -- might be loaded with cocaine and  
14 that it would be -- it's in Bilbao, Spain.

15 Q. And, to be fair, did he share information where the  
16 container was -- originated from?

17 A. No, he did not.

18 Q. Not from United States, do you believe that?

19 A. He didn't tell me where it came from at the time.

20 Q. Ecuador maybe?

21 A. I don't know. He didn't tell me.

22 Q. All right. And, Agent Rego, you indicated to the  
23 Government that you contacted LaGuardia Seville the same day?

24 A. No, I never said that. I said that I contacted Spanish  
25 Customs that same day.

1 Q. Okay. The Customs; right?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Of Port of Bilbao?

4 A. No. I contacted my point of contact in Madrid.

5 Q. Oh, in Madrid?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. And that was the same day, April 25th?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. And can you please, so we can understand here, what was the  
10 conversation between you and the Customs of Madrid?

11 A. I told him that we had some information that a container --  
12 and I gave him the container number -- might possibly be loaded  
13 with cocaine and if they could check to see if they had any  
14 records of that container.

15 Q. And what was the answer you received?

16 A. The answer was that they were going to look into it. And  
17 they contacted me later that day and said that four days  
18 earlier they had intercepted that container and it was positive  
19 for cocaine.

20 Q. And they interpreted it in Port of Bilbao --

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. -- you indicated?

23 DEFENDANT DIDANI: Mr. Fink, can you please -- the  
24 Port of Bilbao, Spain.

25 Your Honor --

1 THE COURT: Is this on the map?

2 DEFENDANT DIDANI: Yes, your Honor.

3 THE COURT: Okay.

4 BY DEFENDANT DIDANI:

5 Q. So that's Port of Bilbao, see?

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. And that's Spain; right?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. And Port of Bilbao is somewhere; yes?

10 A. It's on the north coast, yes.

11 Q. North coast, all right. And they indicated that four days  
12 earlier it was seized -- a container was seized with cocaine;  
13 right?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. And you have no idea where that cocaine came from; right?

16 A. No.

17 Q. And to be fair, Agent Rego, United States has nothing to do  
18 with that seizure; right?

19 A. Other than an agent from the United States calling me on  
20 it, I don't know what part of the investigation has to do with  
21 United States or not.

22 Q. Agent Rego, did you follow up with this investigation with  
23 Spain, or no?

24 A. No, I didn't -- I passed the information to TFO Leach. And  
25 usually the Spanish would conduct their own investigation.



1 Q. Other than that phone call with Agent Leach, did you have  
2 any other phone calls with Detective Leach?

3 A. No, I don't recall I did.

4 Q. He never contacted you before?

5 A. No.

6 Q. After?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Did the Government -- when the Government contacted you?

9 A. Excuse me?

10 Q. When did the Government contacted you?

11 A. Back then or now?

12 Q. Now.

13 A. A few months back.

14 Q. And they asked you to come testify here in Detroit?

15 A. They asked me to -- if I could find out who had actually  
16 done the seizure in Bilbao.

17 Q. So basically two months -- early two months the Government  
18 didn't even know who did the seizure in 2020; right?

19 A. It was more than two months ago.

20 Q. Three months?

21 A. I don't remember exactly when, but they knew the agency.  
22 They didn't know the individual.

23 Q. So basically to be fair, Agent Rego, the Eastern District  
24 of Michigan had no idea about that load, right, other than  
25 photos or videos; right?

1 A. No. I believe they had gotten information from the Spanish  
2 on it.

3 Q. From what now?

4 A. I believe they had requested information from the Spanish  
5 and received information from the Spanish.

6 Q. Through MLAT?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. To be clear, that seizure was not as a result of United  
9 States, Eastern District of Michigan?

10 MR. BILKOVIC: Objection, asked and answered, your  
11 Honor.

12 THE COURT: It is asked and answered, maybe not quite  
13 that way, but close.

14 You may answer that.

15 THE WITNESS: I wasn't involved with the  
16 investigation. So I do not know whether U.S. -- whether United  
17 States was involved or not involved in this investigation.

18 THE COURT: Okay. Go to a new question.

19 DEFENDANT DIDANI: No further questions, Agent Rego.  
20 Thank you very much, sir.

21 THE COURT: Redirect?

22 MR. BILKOVIC: Just briefly.

23 REDIRECT EXAMINATION

24 BY MR. BILKOVIC:

25 Q. Some of the information that was provided by Spain, does

1 Spain, when they do their reports of their narratives, do they  
2 always list the names of the law enforcement people that are  
3 involved?

4 A. They do not.

5 Q. Do they basically conceal them using PIN numbers?

6 A. Yes, they do.

7 Q. And so when you were asked to find out who the people were  
8 when the government official asked you to do that, were they  
9 trying to find out to find out the specific names of the people  
10 that were involved in the seizure so we didn't bring 20 people  
11 here to see who was involved in the actual going into the  
12 container?

13 DEFENDANT DIDANI: Objection. He's leading the  
14 witness, your Honor.

15 THE COURT: He is, but I'm going to allow it at this  
16 point.

17 THE WITNESS: Yes.

18 BY MR. BILKOVIC:

19 Q. And do you know who it was that sought that information  
20 from you? I mean, the question is the government. I'm just  
21 trying to find out if you have a name.

22 A. Can you repeat the question?

23 Q. Who was it that reached out to you to try and get the  
24 actual names of the people that were involved in pulling the  
25 actual cocaine from the containers?

1 A. Special Agent Chad Hermans.

2 MR. BILKOVIC: Thank you. Nothing further.

3 THE COURT: Special agent who?

4 THE WITNESS: Chad Hermans.

5 THE COURT: Any other questions?

6 MR. BILKOVIC: Nothing from the Government, your  
7 Honor.

8 THE COURT: Mr. Didani, you have additional questions?

9 RE CROSS EXAMINATION

10 BY DEFENDANT DIDANI:

11 Q. You indicated that Agent Hermans called you?

12 A. Reached out to me to find out who had -- who were the  
13 individuals that actually had done the seizure.

14 Q. And when was that?

15 A. Six months ago maybe. I don't remember the date.

16 Q. So basically it was about four years after the seizure of  
17 the load?

18 A. Yeah.

19 DEFENDANT DIDANI: Thank you very much, sir.

20 THE COURT: Can this witness step down?

21 MR. BILKOVIC: Nothing further. Yes.

22 THE COURT: Is he free to go?

23 DEFENDANT DIDANI: Yes, your Honor.

24 MR. BILKOVIC: Yes, Judge.

25 THE COURT: All right. Thank you for coming.

1 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

2 THE COURT: You may step down and you're free to go.

3 (End of excerpt at 1:57 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE OF COURT REPORTER

10

11 I, Sheila D. Rice, Official Court Reporter of the  
12 United States District Court, Eastern District of Michigan,  
13 appointed pursuant to the provisions of Title 28, United States  
14 Code, Section 753, do hereby certify that the foregoing pages  
15 is a correct transcript from the record of proceedings in the  
16 above-entitled matter.

17

18

19

**s/Sheila D. Rice**

20

Sheila D. Rice, CSR-4163, RPR, RMR, FCRR  
Federal Official Court Reporter  
United States District Court  
Eastern District of Michigan

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Date: 04/11/2025  
Detroit, Michigan.

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